ON THE ROAD

Rainbow/ Pat Travers
San Bernadino

Slayed in the arena

HM PARADISE exists, and you'll find it 65 miles south of Los Angeles. San Bernadino Swing Auditorium is positively swimming with sweaty beer-bellies in distended Sabs and Outlaws T-shirts, long hair, cowboy hats, sweat, more sweat and whisky. There's so much 100% pure alcohol in the air that you're scared to light a match.

But these brave HM pioneers flick their lighters and turn into general arsonists anyway as soon as Pat Travers prances on in a T-shirt and short trendy — gaspo — New Wave hairdo, looking cute enough for the Romantics but obviously tough enough for these cowboys who gargle Jack Daniels and whoop like a children's throat hospital.

It's loud, Make that LOUD!!! I thought my ears were bleeding till I saw the wino next to me who'd spilt his drink on my head. It's a gradual work-up from kind on the ears melodies to all-out battle-of-the-guitar-heroes attack, like 'My Life Is On the Line' from the new piece of plastic, or slow blooze stuff with gentle drift-away teased guitar solos that build up into some grand melodramatic crescendo of brain-singeing axemanship. And then down to business with 'Crash And Burn'. Then it's "official party time", announces Pat, and we get the exuberant singalong chunks of good old rock, 'Boom Boom (Out Go The Lights)', and they come back for more with 'Snortin' Whisky', which to this bunch is much like what the National Anthem is to the Queen Mum.

A cloud of smoke blankets the stage as Rainbow come on to some appropriately pompous and inspiring music, 'Land Of Hope And Glory', looking from a distance like a bunch of heavy smokers on a binge, and singing a few notes of 'Somewhere Over The . . .' before getting their teeth into 'Spotlight Kid'.

This has got to be the outfit that inspires a Rainbow Is A Group slogan. From what I can gather they've only been at it for a couple of months and already they're tighter than two clans of Scotsmen and burn better than Joan of Arc. Ritchie may have group changes like certain other rock guitarists have blood-changes, and though they might do nothing for his complexion, this time they do a hell of a lot for his music. Other than those odd moments of detachedness you've come to expect from him, where he seems to stand back and admire/scoff at his own musicianship before you get the silent what-the-fuck-let's-get-on-with-it brilliance, he's playing like he's enjoying it. Bob Rondinelli ingratiates himself early on by tossing off dozens of drumsticks like Rick Neilsen's plectrums, and Joe Lynn Turner — well they'd have to model an HM doll on this guy 'cause he looks like he came out of the womb in hairspray and leather waistcoat. But his voice goes far beyond the scream range. It goes from sensitive to all-out belt in seconds and holds up longer than a living bra. He brandishes the mike above his head, smashes the air, tosses his body and his barnet with the suitably anguished look of all self-respecting HM frontmen and complements Ritchie's playing perfectly. Though I had a soft spot for departed Graham Bonnet, Joe and co make up a tight, hot, cohesive arena rock band.

Some brand new songs from the brand new album; 'I Surrender' is about the poppiest slice all evening, but live it's got more guts than a slaughterhouse. Blackmore's a master on the axe, makes it look soooo easy. 'Can't Happen Here' sees Turner prancing and scampering about the stage to conduct the clapalongs. Then a slow crypt-like sound from Blackmore's guitar, soft and classical, creeping up into your beaten brain-cells, the soothing sound of 'Greensleeves', an overpowering solo soaring from low rumblings to grandiose roar, a whole bloody orchestra by himself, settling finally into a slow blues that Turner ably takes over, ending with a solo that would turn the strongest mind into molten globs of brain.

Someone jumps the stage and is carted off smiling beatifically into the wings. And back up with a fast one, classic headbanger, before we get another quasi-classical cosmic keyboards solo, Close Encounters meets Music Hall with a dash of church organ chucked in, and the classical track from the new album that sounds like Beethoven's Ninth to me, with a rave-up inbetween.

And then there's the drum solo. I suppose the drummer's been behaving himself all this time so he deserves something more than mere stick-chucking. For someone who's only ever liked Cozy's '1812' drum solo, upstaging the cannons, it all sounded very long and loud and better in the lobby (of the arena down the road). Still there was time to do your weekend shopping and come back and still catch the end of the solo, with Bob running out of sticks and using his fists before getting it back to normal by banging a bloody great gong.

Spotlights on the audience for 'Long Live Rock', a mass acapella singalong, fine anthem, and after a long wait and the lights have been on, back they come for some heavy metal that sounds like the world's falling apart, Ritchie's fingers skimming over the frets, sawing it against the speakers, holding it out, teasing us with a "shall I?" look then bashing shit out of the thing, grinding it into the woodwork and throwing the bones to the crowd.

And still more (this cost them — union rules about going over time), this time an even stronger rendition of 'Long Live Rock', arms pointing all over the place. Good band, good show, good God where's my hearing? This ain't no pop band. If they keep this up, Rainbow will napalm the lot of you by the time they reach UK.

SILVIE SIMMONS

ROGER GLOVER and Joe Lynn Turner: plenty of brutal metallic riffing

Pic by Chris Walter

My night of gloom

beat and runs a crazed hand

New 'pub rock'